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THE KADOTA FIG

PART III

Planting and General Orchard Treatment

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THE BECKWITH COMPANY

Growers, Preservers, Shippers of Kadota Figs

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NUMBER OF TREES TO PLANT PER ACRE

Fig trees of the ordinary drying varieties, Calimyrnas, Adriatics and Missions, are generally given all the room necessary for the development of a large tree with a high trunk, and an immense growth overhead from which the figs drop to the ground. But, Kadotas require much less space. Since they are developed primarily for the production of fresh figs only sufficient space is given for a low crowned tree, branching almost at the surface of the ground, with the maximum of fruit bearing wood within easy reach for picking. The spacing generally adopted now is:

20x20—108 trees to the acre,
24x24— 76 trees to the acre,
or 30x30— 48 trees to the acre.

A still thicker planting is being tried, for the purpose of increasing the income during the early period. One grower has planted his Kadotas at distances of 10 feet, in rows 20 feet apart. The theory in this case is, that while there are few figs borne by Calimyrnas, Adriatics, and Missions during the first six or seven years, the Kadota begins bearing the third year. The Kadota may therefore be used as an intercrop; that is, the permanent trees may be thickly interspersed with others which will produce a large profit during the third, four, fifth, and sixth years, after which it will probably be best to remove the extra trees.

PROPER HANDLING OF THE NURSERY STOCK

The roots of a fig tree will stand less exposure to the air than those of most other nursery trees. You should have good assurance from your nurseryman that at no point during the sorting, bundling, and delivery of the trees, have the roots been exposed to the air longer than absolutely necessary. With careful handling and the use of wet blankets there need be very little exposure to the sun and wind between operations. When delivered the buyer should have his healing trench all ready and it is important that the trees be healed in loose soil which will pack easily around the roots. Use water liberally when healing in.

When the bundles of trees are removed from the healing trench to the place where they are to be planted, no more should be taken than can be planted in a reasonably short space of time. These should be kept damp and well covered with a wet blanket or the roots should be immersed in a tub of water until ready to plant.

PLANTING OF TREES

The months for planting are usually February and March. Planting may be done still later if the season is late, or earlier, if the tree is not allowed to dry out before the sap starts.

In digging the holes plenty of room should be allowed for the roots of the tree. If the holes have not been freshly dug, they should be entirely renewed by a thorough loosening of the dirt around the sides and bottom.

When ready to plant, any split or ragged roots should be cut away, and any tangled or crossed roots straightened out. There should be a pyramid of loose dirt under the base of the tree when placing it so as to give the roots a downward trend. These roots should be spread out carefully with the strongest ones in the direction of the prevailing winds. The soil should be pressed firmly about the roots, the hole filled nearly to the top, using water to settle the dirt, and then 3 or 4 inches of loose soil left on top to hold the moisture.

DEVELOPING THE BECKWITH TYPE OF KADOTA FIG TREE

The months for pruning are December, January and February.

The Beckwith type of Kadota fig tree has an extremely short, thick trunk. The main branches are evenly spaced around it, and spread outward and up to an almost flat top. The center is left more or less open, but the growth from the top branches is allowed to grow over this space, to shield the inside from the sun. There is a space between the branches on one side so that after the outside of the tree has been picked, the picker can gain entrance to the center and pick the inside and top.

The points to observe in pruning are therefore as follow:

First—The SHORT TRUNK.

After planting, the tree should be cut back to the desired height of trunk. This will vary from about ten inches for a 12 to 18 inch tree, to 19 or 20 inches for a tree three to four feet or higher. The result should be a good growth of buds from which we can depend on getting three to seven main branches evenly spaced around the trunk from the ground to the top and growing up in a wide circle.

Second—The FLAT TOP.

The first season's growth is cut to an approximate level about one foot above the place where the nursery tree was cut back, the second year's growth to within ten inches of the previous year's level, the third year's to about eight inches, the fourth year's to seven inches, and the fifth year's to about six inches. After that the annual cuts may not be farther apart than six inches.

It will be noted that in pruning to an approximate level, that the outside limbs are left longer than the inside ones and this rapidly extends the width of the tree.

These are not given as hard and fast rules. Each tree is a problem in itself and individual judgment is required in the amount cut back.

Third—The OPEN CENTER.

While cutting back to a flat top, the season's growth must, at the same time, be thinned out to two or three branches for each branch left the previous year. In making these annual cuts it will be observed that a natural ladder is being formed on the inside for the use of the fig picker, so it is important that any branches which grow straight up from the crotches (where he must place his foot) should be cut out. And the center must be kept just open enough

so that he can step easily and with freedom from one side to the other.

Fourth—The DOORWAY TO THE CENTER.

Beginning with the first pruning, the shady side is selected for the future entrance to the inside of the tree—the “doorway to the center,” we call it. At this point the branches are cut away enough to permit of an opening. During each pruning, limbs which cross and tend to close up this space should be cut out.

Fifth—The CLOSED TOP.

Unless we keep the inside of the tree protected from the hot sun, it is bound to result eventually in an unhealthy condition of the center. Moreover, we get our best fruit in the shade. Therefore the growth from the upper branches is allowed to cover the center space after the tree is a few years old.

RESULTS OBTAINED BY THE BECKWITH METHOD OF PRUNING

We must bear in mind that the greatest expense in connection with a Kadota fig orchard is in picking the fresh figs. The object of Beckwith pruning is to keep the trees as close to the ground as possible so as to facilitate the easy gathering of the fruit.

Incidentally, this style of pruning gives the best quality of fruit and the largest quantity per acre. There is nothing to be gained from a lot of long non-bearing limbs in a Kadota fig tree and a branch high up in the top of a tree, besides being out of easy reach, is apt to be too much exposed to the sun and bear inferior fruit. These bare limbs do not produce any figs and only serve as a framework to support the fruit bearing wood. We therefore keep them as short as possible while multiplying their number to a healthy maximum, and at the same time causing them to spread out in a wide circle, so they can support the greatest amount of annual summer's growth which is the fruit bearing wood.

As an illustration, suppose we start with a trunk 15 inches high, and during the next five years make annual cuts 12, 10, 8, 7, and 6 inches apart; the height of the tree top after the fifth year's pruning will be only about five feet from the ground. But the summer's growth which bears the fruit and foliage will probably average at least three feet over all, making the tree in summer about eight feet high and almost twice that in width.

It will also be noted that starting with a crown of, for example five branches, and thinning out the successive years growth to just double that number each year, that after the fifth year's pruning there will be 80 main branches forming the top. Having the initial growth so distributed it will not be hard to keep the future growth within bounds, and the cost of picking will always be kept at a minimum.

FURTHER POINTS ON PRUNING

Give particular notice to the tendency of the tree as it grows older to throw out the strongest growth on the outside and lower limbs. These tend to rob the tree center. Eventually, if the outside limbs are favored too much, it will result in an unhealthy condition of the center. As evidence of this, notice old fig trees where the growth has stopped at the top and is forcing it way out along the outside.

In the pruning of older trees, if they continue to show a rank growth, it proves that you have not left too much wood and that practically the same amount of pruning can be given it. If the growth is short and feeble, there should be less cutting back and more thinning out. In this case, however, look for the causes. In almost every case of this kind, we have observed that such feeble growth was

due, either to nearness of unblasted hardpan, too shallow cultivation, or insufficient (and sometimes inefficient) irrigation.

IRRIGATION

Water in abundance is our rule with Kadotas. It is impossible to sour or split Kadota Figs from too much water; and the more they get the ranker the growth and the finer the figs.

Irrigation should take place during periods which are approximately as follows:

First irrigation, May 1 to May 15.

Second irrigation, June 1st until the first crop is nearly ripe, generally July 1st.

Third irrigation, July 15 to August 1. (Between the first and second crops).

Fourth irrigation, about August 25 to September 1. (Especially desirable if the weather is very hot).

The first three irrigations should be slow and penetrating. The last irrigation on account of the short time allowed between pickings must be done with greater speed.

Methods of irrigation will always vary, according to the district, the character of the land and preference of the owner. It is our judgment, however, that deep furrow irrigation is the best. The furrows must be as nearly level as possible. The object is to get the water to stand at a good depth in the furrow and soak into the subsoil without flooding the top of the ground.

CULTIVATION

We often encounter the question of how to perform the cultivation of the orchard when the trees are so close to the ground and spread out so far. In cultivating with a team of horses, this might be a problem, but even if extra hoeing has to be resorted to, it is cheaper than having to climb a high ladder to pick figs. However, in using a tractor it is very easy to swing a spring tooth harrow or wide disc under the branches and work up a mulch under the tree. The dense shade also helps to conserve the moisture under the tree.

We do not attempt to plow closer than the outside limbs, but out in the open we plow deep. Plowing is done in the winter or early spring. Subsequent cultivation is most beneficial if carried on with deep tillage tools, which will keep the soil loose to a depth of 6 to 8 inches.

The principle we employ, is to keep the feeding roots below 7 or 8 inches from the surface, except under the tree, where they can come up to 3 or 4 inches. With a good mulch of 6 to 8 inches thick over the root feeders, they will not suffer between irrigations, and when irrigating, the soil takes the water easier. Another consideration is, that with a very thick layer of soil, there is less packing of the subsoil by cultivating instruments.

PICKING THE FIGS

Fresh figs should be picked when they have just reached the point of ripeness. They should not be green nor allowed to shrivel. This will require going over the trees at regular intervals throughout the ripening season. Good pickers average 300 to 400 pounds per day during the season.

In picking the fruit the ordinary bucket is not practical. We use the gallon size of fruit can. This is hung around the neck of the picker by means of a rope or strap. This leaves both of his hands free to pick figs and in stepping around the inside branches of the tree it is not in the way. This can will hold about ten pounds of figs and when full it is carefully emptied into shallow boxes holding about twenty pounds of figs.

In conclusion, no infallibility is claimed for all of our methods but they are the results of long experience in growing almost every California fruit, the last six years of which has been devoted exclusively to the Kadota Fig.